

# WHY WE GO



## People Groups: The Ingessana

### Ask God To

- Grant wisdom and favour to missions agencies ministering to the Ingessana.
- Raise up workers to join the few who have already responded.
- Strengthen, encourage and protect the small number of Ingessana Christians.
- Bring forth a triumphant Ingessana Church for the glory of his name!

One of the groups taking refuge in Mabaan, South Sudan, is the Ingessana, a people who have never been conquered and are infamous for their hostility towards strangers. Because of their isolation, they have been influenced very little by outsiders. They call themselves *Gaamg Jok*, which means hill people.

### Culture and customs

The Ingessana rely equally on crops and herds for survival. They graze their cattle, sheep and goats about three hours away from their villages. Millet is their staple crop, and they grow two crops a year: one on the hillsides near the houses, and another on the plains. If necessary, they grow sesame to compensate for a poor sorghum harvest.

Traditionally, children are cared for by their parents until they reach adolescence. Women and young children live separately until the children reach puberty. Most girls are betrothed while very young and marry during adolescence. When boys reach puberty, they either begin herding their fathers' cattle in temporary camps on the plains, or move in with a maternal uncle or other relative. When a boy reaches age 15 he must undergo difficult circumstances

for two years, and during this time he is not allowed to see a woman. After this period he is considered mature, but he must still complete a 40-step programme to be considered responsible and worth listening to. A girl is required to complete a 20-step programme in order to reach maturity and be considered responsible.

Ingessana society is divided into many sections, each with its own grazing ground, hunting areas and farmland. A chief serves as the religious and political head of each section. He usually lives in a separate hut called the "hut of the sun," which is also the center of religious life. A number of sections make up one tribe, and each tribe is led by a "hereditary war leader." Opportunities for education are limited so very few Ingessana are educated.

### Beliefs

Though most would say they are Muslims, their beliefs and practices include traditional religion, such as wearing amulets and charms to ward off spirits. The Ingessana worship the sun (Tel), and believe that it is the creator of life and of the universe. They call upon Tel during important crises, such as drought, a child becoming sick or a woman being barren. Shrines for Tel in each village are worshipped regularly.

When an Ingessana dies, he or she is buried – along with food, weapons and other possessions – wherever they are lying. A man who is extremely ill will try to reach his own village before he dies, and a woman will leave her husband and go to the house of her father. When a person dies outside their village, the family performs a ceremony to call their spirit back to the village. The deceased are then washed, ornately decorated and covered in cloth.

### Christian outreach

SIM, Pioneer Bible Translators and the Sudan Interior Church have engaged this people group. Parts of the Ingessana community are very open to the gospel. SIM missionaries provide Bible studies twice a week for three different groups. Translation of the New Testament into Gaam, the name of their language, is underway by Pioneer Bible Translators.

A great need exists for Christian literature to be translated into Gaam. Laborers are also needed to work among these tribes, showing the love of Jesus in practical ways.

*With thanks to "H," one of the first Ingessana Christians; the Joshua Project; and Bethany World Prayer Center. Photo by Khambawi Ngaihte.*